

Utah's Homeless Count

Measuring the scope of homelessness isn't an exact science. The population is fluid, and different government agencies define homelessness differently. But in recognition of the principle that you can't manage what you do not measure, Utah is now coordinating with other states to take better stock of its homeless.

- On any given night, about 3,000 Utahns are homeless. About 14,000 men, women and children are homeless over the course of a year, 0.5 percent of the state's total population.

These numbers are based on a point-in-time count, an annual ritual during the last week of January in which volunteers fan out and canvass shelters, detox centers and city streets for homeless Utahns. The tallies are entered into a database managed by the State Homeless Coordinating Committee. An annual count is derived, based on a formula.

Homelessness, by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development's definition, is being "without a permanent place to live that is fit for human habitation."

Public schools, however, view homelessness differently. Utah's annual count does not include 7,430 homeless school children, many of whom couch surf with their families or live doubled-up in substandard dwellings.

The count also excludes homeless people in jail and the hospital. For these reasons, the count underestimates the population.

Who are Utah's Homeless?

- 86 percent are temporarily homeless; they stay in shelters for brief periods and do not return
- 14 percent are chronically homeless, those with a disabling condition who have been homeless for one year or more, or who have fallen into homelessness at least four times within three years. The vast majority are male, and one-third are veterans. Many struggle with mental illness and addictions.
- 65 percent are single men or women
- 35 percent are people in families, compared with 41 percent nationally
- 85 percent are Utah residents; your neighbors, friends and relatives
- 90 percent live along the Wasatch Front, concentrated in Salt Lake and Weber counties